

OPEN BOOK: A CELEBRATION OF WORDS

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An open book ... words on a page ... lyrics ... poetry ... drama ... plays ... novels ... nonfiction ... dialogue ... movies. These are all different forms that words take on. In these various forms words affect our thoughts, imaginations, and our lives. Libraries are receptacles for words in whichever shapes the creators choose to use. The Saint Joseph County Public Library's Open Book Festival reaches out to the Michiana community to celebrate words with a day of activities.

The Saint Joseph County Public Library held its first Open Book Festival on Saturday March 23, 2002, from 10 a.m. until 4 p.m.. The day was filled with music, children's activities, and writing and author events. At intervals throughout the day, patrons enjoyed Big Band era songs, Hispanic music, and steel drums were heard from the second floor balcony. The numerous children's activities included storytelling, handcrafted marionettes performing "Rumplestiltskin," children creating items related to fairy tales and then acting out the tales, and an interactive poetry break.

The featured children's celebrity was Granger artist and children's book illustrator Bruce Langton. Mr. Langton conducted a fun, simple drawing program for children. He introduced the program with an explanation of how he began his career as an artist, followed with a slide show of his paintings and studio, and concluded by instructing the children how to create a detailed drawing which they took home. At the end the children asked questions about Mr. Langton's work.

Mr. Langton also participated on a panel discussion which covered different aspects of publishing such as how to get published for the first time, writing technical manuscripts, breaking into magazine and newspaper publishing with nonfiction articles, illustrating children's books, and writing romantic fiction. A workshop about overcoming writer's block and a local newspaper columnist's talk about developing story ideas were the other events for authors.

The adult celebrity authors were Indiana author James Alexander Thom and Dark Rain Thom, author of *Shawnee: Kobbkumthema's Grandchildren*. Mr. Thom

spoke about writing his historical novels and the American history that provides the background for his works. Dark Rain talked about her history of the Shawnee and the plans for the National Lewis and Clark Bicentennial for which she is director of the planning council. Borders Books and Music handled the sale of Mr. Thom's books which Mr. Thom then autographed.

Poetry was featured at Open Book at the children's poetry break, previously described, and in two other events. A local actress who also is the manager of the library's cataloging department performed selections from a one woman show about Emily Dickinson. Local poets recited their works followed by an open mic session.

The first 100 attendees selected a free book to take home for their enjoyment. There were drawings for gift certificates to Border Books and Music and for books by the featured authors and illustrators. Centrally located on the first floor was a welcome table with festival programs, small trinkets, and bookmarks for people to pick up when they entered the building. A picnic room was open from 11 a.m. until 2 p.m. for people to eat snacks or rest between programs.

A committee consisting of approximately ten librarians met in August 2000 to determine the purpose and form of the festival. The committee decided it wanted to have an ongoing annual event to promote the fun of reading and to raise the profile of the library in the community. The festival mission statement is: to celebrate authors and illustrators who inspire dreams, spark curiosity, and promote the joys of reading. The committee selected the name "Open Book : A Celebration of Words" with a logo of an open book for the festival.

The St. Joseph County Public Library modeled Open Book after the Novello Festival of Reading in Charlotte, NC. Novello (www.novellofestival.net) commenced in 1989 as a program created by the Public Library of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County. Several St. Joseph County Public Library librarians attended the PLA 2000 program about Novello which fired their imaginations and began the journey to Open Book.

To achieve the festival's goals the committee quickly realized the necessity of exploring funding options such as the Friends of the Saint Joseph County Public Library, corporate sponsors, the Indiana Arts Commission funds, and various foundations. In January 2001 the Library Director Mr. Donald Napoli made a generous offer of \$25,000 from the interest of a gift fund to pay the speaker's fees. After taking into consideration the amount of time needed to book a celebrity author and the funds available, it was decided to postpone an author presentation until 2003 and to plan an author luncheon event for April 2002. The luncheon's goal was to attract people from area organizations who would hopefully be sponsors for 2003 Open Book.

An attempt was made to contact an author to donate his time to speak at the luncheon, but this was unsuccessful. Due to this lack of response, the committee decided to work with a different format. Utilizing the expertise gained from 10 years of planning the very successful Science Alive, it planned a one day event to be held on Saturday March 23, 2002, at the Main Library from 10 am until 4 pm. To fund the festival, \$6,000 was allocated from the interest on the library's gift fund.

By late summer 2001 Indiana author James Alexander Thom and his wife Dark Rain had been booked as the star authors, local illustrator and artist Bruce Langton as the children's celebrity, and Stevens Puppets to perform "Rumplestiltskin." Charting the available meeting spaces in the Main Library helped the committee decide that three performances or activities would occur simultaneously. As the date of the festival drew near, more details were settled and arrangements double checked. On March 23, 2002, the committee saw the fruition of its preparations - the first annual Open Book Festival with 660 people attending!

While plans were finalized for 2002 Open Book the committee looked ahead to the 2003 festival. It decided to have a one day festival, building on the foundation of 2002 Open Book. A subcommittee explored grant opportunities with the Indiana Arts Commission and foundations administered by the Wells Fargo Bank in South Bend as well as funding from the Friends of the St. Joseph County Public Library; it filled out an application for a grant from the Wells Fargo Bank's foundations.

In February 2002 the Friends of the St. Joseph County Public Library agreed to match up to \$5000 that the Festival received from a non-library source for 2003. At the end of May 2002 the committee was notified that four foundations from the Wells Fargo Bank granted us \$5000 for 2003 Open Book! In July 2002 the Friends of the Saint Joseph County Public Library pledged their support of \$5000. With a budget of \$10,000, the Open

Book Committee looks forward to the 2003 Open Book: A Celebration of Words!

NOTE: The second annual Open Book Festival was held on April 12, 2003. Featured authors were: Best selling author, Elizabeth Berg (Open House; Talk Before Sleep; Durable Goods); children's author April Pulley Sayre (Dig, Wait, Listen: A Desert Toad's Tale; Noodle Man: The Pasta Superhero) and manga author Fred Gallagher (Megatokyo). See the festival web site at <http://www.openbookfestival.org/>.

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